



Global Matricultures Research Network

Calls for presentations

CASCA virtual conference 12-15 May 2021

Symposium: Matriculture

Convenors: Marie-Françoise Guédon (Ottawa) and Kierra Beament (Ottawa)

Submission deadline: 27 January 2021

Panel Title: ON THE MOTHER'S SIDE: THEORETICAL CONSEQUENCES OF EXTREME VARIATION IN MATRILINEAL KINSHIP SYSTEMS FOR DEFINING DESCENT GROUPS

Kinship studies in general and the study of matrilineal systems in particular have been strongly influenced for half a century by a school of thought that found its main expression in the Cross-Cultural Survey established in 1935 and initiated by George Peter Murdock and his colleagues from Yale University. One intellectual habit we inherit from their work is the use of five classic categories of descent and kinship systems, that is, bilateral, patrilineal, matrilineal, bilineal and ambilineal descent systems, with an emphasis on the first three (the two others having been judged rare, ambiguous, or irrelevant for theoretical pursuits). These categories were established from a male perspective.

Annette Weiner proposed that we give equal importance in our analysis to the domains controlled by men and those controlled by women. She warned, however, that if we do so, the traditional categories of family, filiation, and kinship will acquire multidimensional significations exceeding the limits of past definition (Weiner, 1983: 35). Spurred by the development of gender studies, the inclusion of women's perspectives in anthropological research, and the participation of local female researchers, a closer look at matrilineal societies does indeed reveal a tension between the need to fit them into one of five classical categories and the recognition of the fact that their kinship systems do not fit these categories. It also places a new emphasis on their diversification, which is more and more acknowledged by scholars.

In a sample of societies that do not fit squarely into one of the categories originally proposed by anthropologists, one finds such anomalies as the Jamnyo diving fisherwomen communities on Jeju island in Korea, who conjugate Confucian patriarchal norms with matrilocality and female governance (Ok-Kiung Pak, 2018), matrilocal Greek islands with inheritance of estates by women with or without primogeniture and who exert a level of control that may extend to the reproductive capacity of sisters (Casselberry and Valavanis, 1976), societies organized in houses transmitted from the mother to one of her daughters (Gillespie 2000), societies such as the Tlingit, where both the mother's side and the father's side are recognized for identity, but with different functions (one is born *within* a clan, but born *for* another clan), and societies where the father's side is not recognized at all (the Mosuo in China).

In societies identified by Murdock as patrilineal or matrilineal, one can sometimes discover a bilineal system (male lineage for the men, female lineage for the women, for instance) or ambilineal (alternating from the father's side to the mother's side from child to child), or individuals belonging to two kinship systems at once, where the mother's side corresponds to inheritance of one kind (civilian life instance) and the father's side corresponds to another (such as warrior status). Some lineages are not built directly on consanguineal ties, but on personal names, such as in the case of Karpathos, where inheritance is founded on the names attributed to children. This links them to one of the lineages of their grandparents, resulting in neatly separated male and female lineages based economically on gendered and indivisible inheritance (Karpathios, Vernier, 1999: 11). There are many variations on the dual descent theme. Furthermore, all these systems usually allow pragmatic considerations to intervene in the composition of kin groups membership.

Ethnologists have responded to this situation by offering a range of definitions for matrilineality, ranging from descent based on lines of inheritance of status or estate, to purely biological connections, to cohabitation in matrilineal residence, to a mix of criteria, often depending on the kind of society with which each individual ethnologist is familiar. In order to unravel some of the questions arising from such diversity, we seek the contributions of researchers dealing with communities characterized by a strong matriculture and by ambiguous kinship systems that deviate from the models usually ascribed by anthropological traditions. We are looking for, among other things, ethnographic descriptions, for discussion of the research conditions necessary for such enquiry, and for semantic explorations .

Possible presentations may include but are not limited to:

- Ethnographic reports, including descriptions of dual and mixed systems
- Reinterpretations of past ethnographic studies
- Epistemological explorations of the concepts associated with the classical categories of descent, including dualistic models of gender
- Descriptions of emic perceptions of kinship systems, governance patterns, gender, domesticity, and so on

Abstract submissions are invited of 250 words maximum.

Abstract submissions should be sent to Marie-Françoise Guédon (mguedon@uottawa.ca) or to Linnéa Rowlett (lrowlett@networkonculture.ca).

About the Global Matricultures Research Network (MatNet)

The Global Matricultures Research Network (MatNet) is a project of the International Network for Training, Education, and Research in Culture (Network on Culture) and, specifically, is an

international network for research based on Marie-Françoise Guédon's concept of matriculture. That is, as a cultural system in the classical Geertzian sense within which the experiences and expressions of women are primary.

Similar to other cultural systems such as art, religion, or mathematics, employing the heuristic of matriculture allows for, among other things: cross-cultural comparisons; fresh insights into the social roles of women, men, children, and the entire community of humans, animals, and the environment; or renewed understandings of historically mis-labelled cultures. With Guédon's work in mind, then, and based on Geertzian principles, the concept of matriculture is both a model of reality by rendering the structure of matricultures apprehensible and a model for reality, where psychological relationships are organized under its guidance. MatNet encourages and supports research which explores, evaluates, re-evaluates, and interprets global cultures from this perspective.

For more information about MatNet, visit our webpage at <https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities>.